



Center for Urban and Regional Affairs

KRIS NELSON COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH PROGRAM

...a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)

Access to and Affordability of St. Paul Recreation Centers for Low Income Families

Prepared in partnership with
The East Side Neighborhood Development Company

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Background

Since the recession, the City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department has been faced with heightened budget constraints. In response, the city adopted a “quality over quantity” stance regarding the 42 recreation centers it operated. Of those recreation centers, 17 of them were either closed completely or partnered with non-profit organizations. These partnerships provide quality programming, but typically these programs are one very specific activity rather than the variety of activities, resources, and programming available at a city-operated recreation center. Community leaders in some neighborhoods see a disparity when it comes to the neighborhoods in which recreation centers were closed or partnered; they see wealthier neighborhoods with more ability to advocate maintaining their city-operated recreation centers at a higher rate than lower-income neighborhoods. Figures 1 and 2 show recreation center status and median household income. Figures 3-5 show just the closed recreation centers over the median household income, poverty rate, and neighborhood districts.

FIGURE 1: Saint Paul Census Tracts: Median Household Income, Recreation Center Status



FIGURE 2: Median Household Income, Recreation Center Status

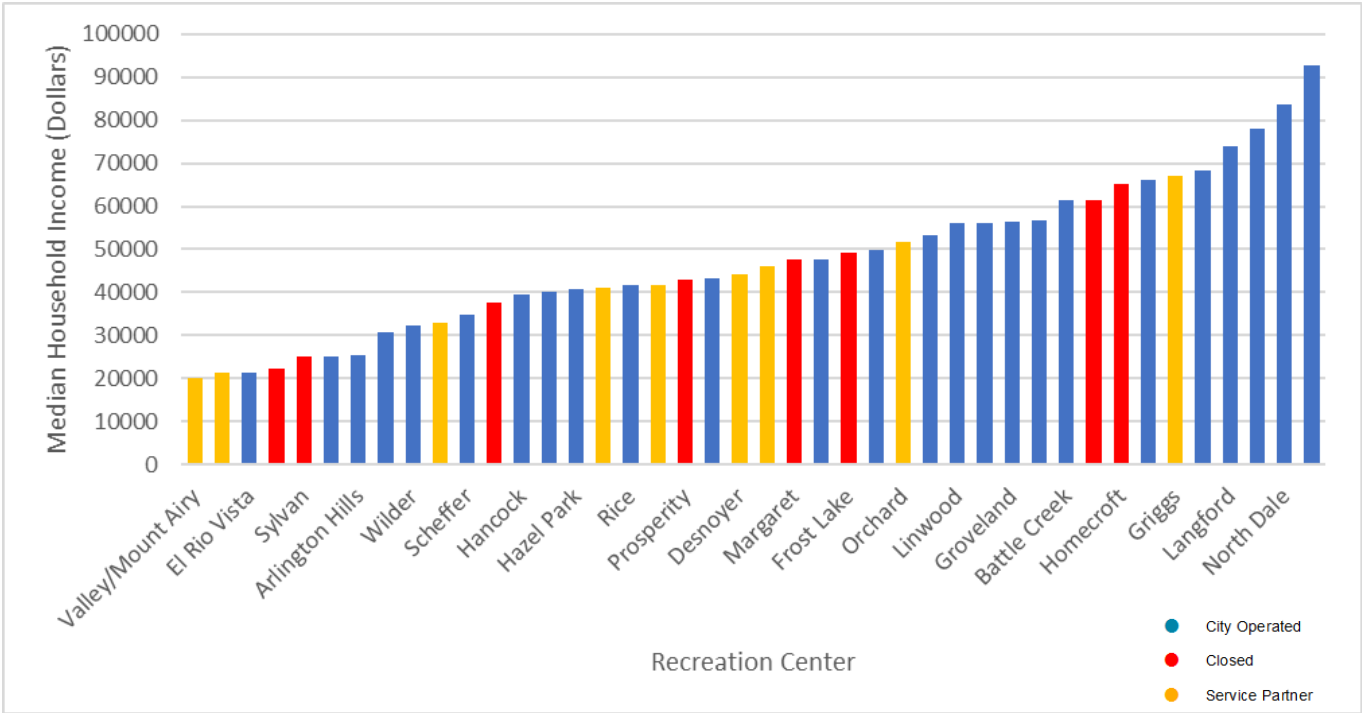


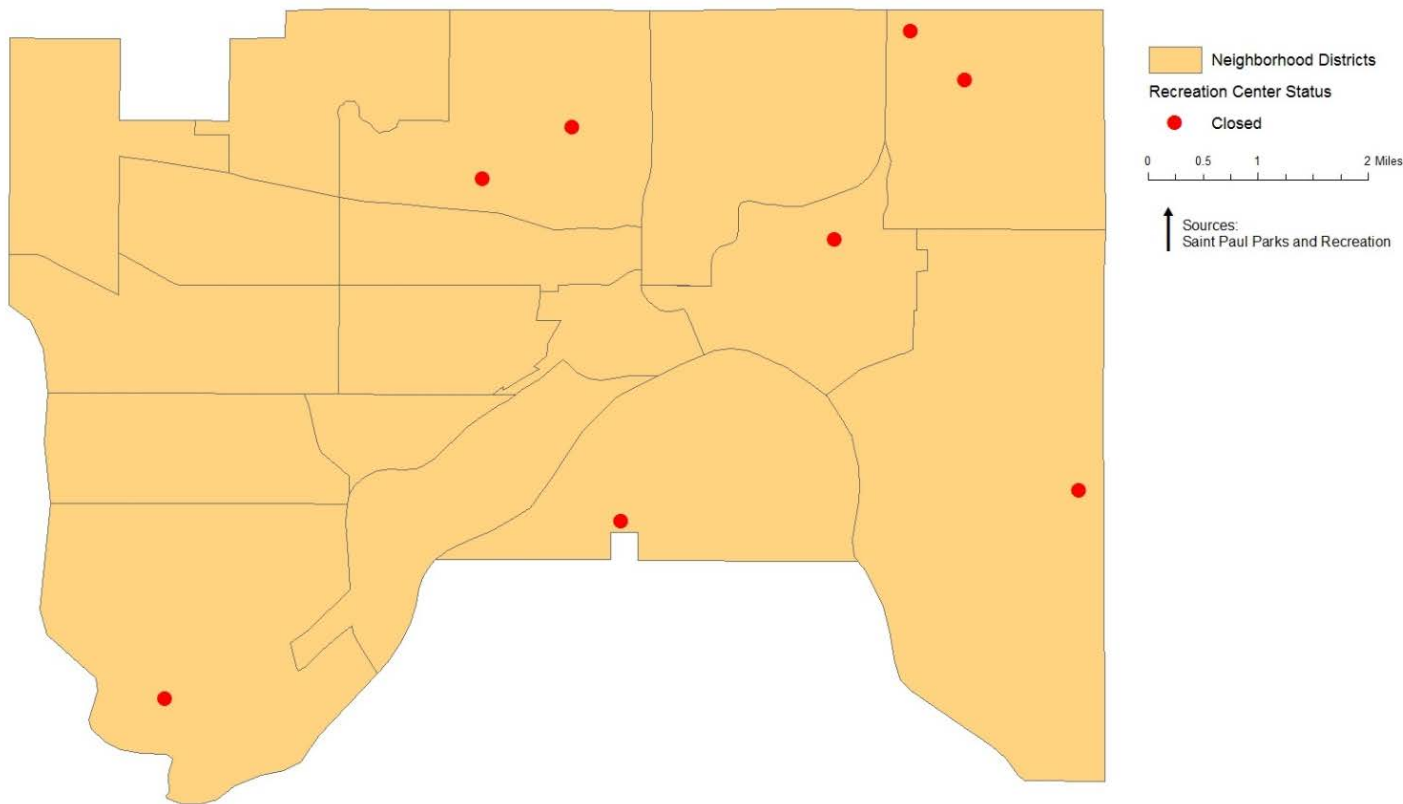
FIGURE 3: Saint Paul Census Tracts: Median Household Income, Closed Recreation Centers



FIGURE 4: Saint Paul Census Tracts: Percent Poverty, Closed Recreation Centers



FIGURE 5: Neighborhood Districts, Closed Recreation Centers



Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better understand who is using the recreation centers in the lower-income areas of the city. Additionally, we want to better understand what activities or programs bring people to the recreation centers in these neighborhoods, how people travel there, and how far they come from.

Methodology


To gather community feedback from recreation center users, we decided to create a survey and administer it at recreation centers. An adult survey and a youth survey were created; see figures 6 and 7. The recreation centers we chose to administer the survey at are primarily on the East side of Saint Paul and fall within some of census tracts with the lowest median income in the city: Dayton's Bluff, Duluth and Case, El Rio Vista, Scheffer, and Wilder. Surveys were administered at each recreation center for one weekday during the entirety of their open hours which was typically 3pm-9pm.


FIGURE 6: Youth Survey


RECREATION CENTER SURVEY


The goal of this survey is to understand who is using Saint Paul recreation centers and how they are using them. All responses will be kept confidential. Thank you for your participation!

How do you usually get here? (circle)

BIKE

CAR

WALK

BUS/TRAIN

OTHER

Do you live in Saint Paul? (circle one)

YES NO

Do you live in the neighborhood? (circle one)

YES NO

What activities do you do at the recreation center?

What do you like or not like about the recreation center?

Are there any activities that you wish were available at the recreation center?

Name:


Age:


FIGURE 7: Adult Survey


RECREATION CENTER SURVEY


The goal of this survey is to understand who is using Saint Paul recreation centers and how they are using them. All responses will be kept confidential. Thank you for your participation!

How do you usually get here? (circle)

BIKE

CAR

WALK

BUS/TRAIN

OTHER

What is the closest street intersection to your home?

What activities or features do you come to the recreation center for?

Are there any activities or features that you would like to see added to the recreation center?

What would make you use the recreation center or activities more than you currently do?

Do you think the fees are appropriate?

Name:

Email:

Results

The results revealed several patterns that were not expected. The first surprise was the low numbers of people visiting the recreation centers. All the recreation center managers pointed out that the season, day of the week, and weather can all affect how busy the recreation centers are on any given day. Figure 8 includes total survey numbers.

FIGURE 8: Total Number of Surveys Taken at Each Recreation Center

Recreation Center	Total Number of Surveys
Dayton's Bluff	24
Duluth and Case	20
El Rio Vista	41
Scheffer	22
Wilder	17

We also saw a large majority of visitors who live in the neighborhood and walk or bike to the recreation center near their home. Figure 9 includes the percent of surveys that indicated they walked or biked to the recreation center as well as the percent that indicated they live in the neighborhood.

FIGURE 9: Proximity and Travel Mode

Recreation Center	Percent Walk or Bike	Percent Live in the Neighborhood
Recreation Center	62%	76%
Dayton's Bluff	78%	78%
Duluth and Case	70%	64%
El Rio Vista	67%	67%
Scheffer	88%	94%
Wilder	62%	76%

Another unexpected result was that there were very few, if any adults using some of the recreation centers; from all five recreation centers, we collected only 12 adult surveys. It is important to note that adults were less willing to spend the time to fill out a survey which contributed to these low numbers as well. The complete list of adult survey responses can be found at the end of the report.

The average age of survey respondents for the youth surveys was 10 years old (Figure 10). Some general themes among the youth survey results included high rates of open gym use a just "hanging out" as well as the desire for a pool in their recreation center and specific recreation programming, especially football. The complete list of youth survey responses can be found at the end of the report

FIGURE 10: Average Age of Youth Survey Respondents

Recreation Center	Avg. Age (youth)
Dayton's Bluff	10
Duluth and Case	10
El Rio Vista	12
Scheffer	10
Wilder	10

Conclusion

The most apparent trends we found through this survey are that the recreation centers are used primarily by youth with an average age of 10 who live in the neighborhood and walk or bike there. Additionally, we learned that most recreation center users do not travel far to get to a recreation center. With this in mind we can better understand how the spatial distribution of recreation centers throughout the city affects which residents are being best served by recreation centers; when the focus is on quality over quantity, some neighborhoods get left out.